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The Most Thankless Job in the U.S.?

Perhaps the most revealing thing about the change in command at the Central Intelligence Agency is the announcement that Richard G. Helms is to be the new deputy director. Helms, who has been deputy director of plans for CIA since 1947, is a former newspaperman and therefore may be presumed to know something about public relations. And the CIA needs all the help it can get in this field.

It is entirely conceivable that one of the big reasons that have impelled John A. McCone to resign as director is the thanklessness of the job. The brickbats come frequently; the praise almost not at all. If the CIA does a good job in handling some difficult foreign assignment it has to keep it to itself; if it bungles the news usually leaks out.

Heading the CIA is, of course, a tremendous responsibility. It can get us into a peck of trouble if it slips up; or, when it does its job well, it can keep us from being surprised or even defeated by an enemy.

It probably will be years before we learn enough about what the CIA has done under McCone's direction to determine whether he was an efficient administrator. The new director, retired Vice Adm. William F. Raborn Jr., is a career Navy man who has distinguished himself in several important assignments. How well qualified he is to direct the CIA will be determined by what he does, not by what he has done. And doubtless we shall be a long time learning what he does. Meantime, he should find it comforting to have an old hand like Helms at his elbow.

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